

# **OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP--WHAT IS IT?**

**A MONOGRAPH  
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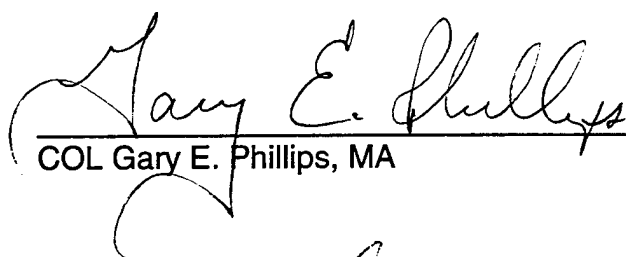
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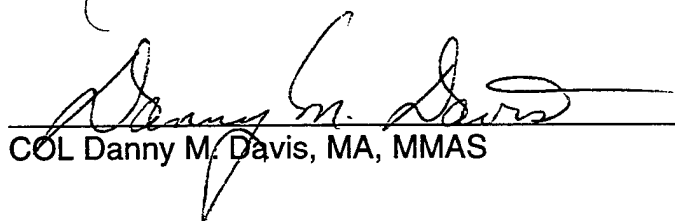
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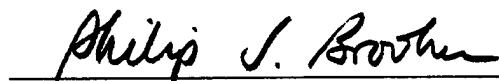
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## **ABSTRACT**

OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP - WHAT IS IT? by Major Clarence Neason, Jr., 54 pages

This monograph focuses on identifying, defining, and analyzing, operational leadership. Leadership is professed to be the most important element of combat power yet it remains essentially a theoretical construct defined more by its attributes than its effects. Leadership is more than the sum of its parts. Doctrine defines leadership as the process of influencing others to accomplish a mission by providing purpose, direction, and motivation. Nevertheless, this definition seems broad and reflective of our difficulty harnessing and putting 'leadership', the concept, in precise form.

Hence, it is from this point that the author departs to identify and analyze the relatively new term in our lexicon, 'operational leadership'. Operational leadership will be examined primarily through the constructs of vision, mentoring, and organizational culture/command climate.

Leadership at the operational level demands a thorough understanding of war. This understanding is more than just technical and tactical competence. A true understanding of war is borne of history, theory, education, training, and experience. Leadership is an amalgamation of these and other elements therefore, it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of leadership because no one component is dominant. Thus, operational leadership is not the result of a finite acquisition of traits or characteristics, but rather, a continuous, learning process. Nevertheless, there are some key characteristics that operational leaders should possess. Specifically, this monograph will examine operational leadership from a perspective that the author considers critical to developing, maintaining, and sustaining effective leadership at the operational level.

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## INTRODUCTION

Leadership at the operational level requires a comprehensive understanding of war. This requires an active mind, a mind which is open and curious, and one which has more than simply technical competence. War is a human activity which requires human intelligence for success.<sup>1</sup>

Leadership is professed to be the most important element of combat power yet it remains essentially a theoretical construct defined more by its attributes than its effects. Leadership is more than the sum of its parts. Doctrine defines leadership as the process of influencing others to accomplish a mission by providing purpose, direction, and motivation. This definition seems broad and reflective of our difficulty harnessing and putting 'leadership', the concept, in precise form. Nevertheless, there are basic precepts generic to every leadership circumstance that must be attended to, and ultimately define a leader's actions. They are the led, the leader, the situation, and communications.<sup>2</sup>

These precepts will be examined as a means of identifying and analyzing this relatively new concept in

our professional lexicon, 'operational leadership'. Operational leadership will be examined through the constructs of mentoring (the led), vision (the leader), and organizational culture/command climate (the situation and communications). Prior to discussing operational leadership as a single entity, the concepts of military leadership and operational art will be examined independently, mindful of their interdependent nature.

Operational art is defined in US Army doctrine as the employment of military capabilities to attain strategic and or operational goals in a theater of operations through the design, integration, and conduct of campaigns, major operations, and battles. A major operation is the coordinated, sequenced, phased and related actions of forces toward an intermediate objective that is linked to a strategic aim.<sup>3</sup> The focus of operational art is the application of combat power so as to optimize the synergy of military forces while shaping the battlefield for future success. The first step for focusing an organization in a given direction is establishing a projected endstate, a vision, for the organization. A caveat of this 'vision' is that it may



not be a terminal state for the organization but rather a transitional state within the scheme of a larger plan.

The means for establishing an organization's future focus is the commander's vision. Vision is a leader's personal concept of what the organization must be capable of doing or accomplishing by some future point.<sup>4</sup> In the end it represents a reference point against which organizational success can be measured. Additionally, vision provides a means to nurture, mentor, and foster a positive organizational culture that is focused, healthy, and where members share mental and professional ownership in the organization's future.

Organizational culture is a shared feeling, or perception among members of an organization about what life is like in the organization.<sup>5</sup> The culture of an organization is directly correlated to its success. A healthy culture advocates sharing and ownership of responsibilities. The ability of an organization to withstand pressures is borne of a shared culture, that is, shared norms and values.<sup>6</sup> The shaping of an organization's culture to maximize and capitalize on the success of its many diverse elements at the operational

level is a critical aspect of operational leadership. A means of fostering an effective and healthy organizational culture is through the process of sharing experience and knowledge or mentoring.

Mentoring is a means of nurturing and growing leaders through teaching, coaching, counseling, and informal interaction. The notion of vicarious learning is not new, however it does require re-emphasizing as it relates to mentoring. The complexity of the modern battlefield demands more than technical and tactical competence acquired through education and training; it demands experience acquired either directly or vicariously through mentoring.

The essence of leadership at the operational level is the fusing of tactical events with strategic aims. Operational art is the sequencing of a series of related operations which will in the aggregate compromise a campaign designed to secure a strategic objective. The fusing of operational art and operational leadership is through the establishment and sustainment of mutually focused discrete operations dictated by way of the leader's vision and maintained through mentoring (the

led), and organizational culture (the situation and communications).

Leadership at the operational level demands a thorough understanding of war. This understanding is more than just technical and tactical competence. A true understanding of war is achieved by the study of history and theory, as well as education, training, and experience. Leadership is an amalgamation of these and other elements, therefore it is difficult but not impossible to assess the effectiveness of leadership were no one component is always dominant. Thus, operational leadership is not the result of a finite acquisition of traits or characteristics, but rather, a continuous, learning and adapting process. Nevertheless, there are some key characteristics that operational leaders should possess. Specifically, this monograph will examine operational leadership from the perspective of developing, maintaining, and sustaining effective leadership at the operational level.

## Leadership Doctrine

Current U.S. Army leadership doctrine outlines leadership as the ability to provide purpose, direction, and motivation;<sup>7</sup> in essence, military leadership is the practice of influencing soldiers towards the accomplishment of a mission. While doctrinally this generally describes leadership at the tactical level, these concepts are also relevant at the operational and strategic levels. In FM 22-103, Senior Level Leadership, the Army defines, what may be viewed as operational leadership, as "the art of direct and indirect influence and the skill of creating the conditions for sustained organizational success to achieve the desired result".<sup>8</sup> A comparison of these definitions reveals a stratification of means to achieve a desired end differentiated by levels; one micro and the other macro (tactical/individual and operational/organizational). The doctrine of micro-leadership is directed at the tactical level of leadership where the leader is charged with influencing the individual and relatively small groups of individuals. On the other hand, at the macro-leadership level we find leaders attempting to influence multiple semi-

independent organizations to attain a specified goal. Leadership in the past, pre-eighteenth century, was primarily executed in a face to face environment unlike today and the foreseeable future. The growth of modern armies and the dispersed nature of warfare have made face to face leadership impracticable in most cases at the operational level. Given this conceptual outline of Army leadership, this chapter will further examine and define the components of leadership in our doctrine at the operational level.

The Army advocates four major factors of leadership: the led, the leader, the situation and communications. Perhaps the first and foremost factor is the 'led', those who will be charged with executing orders. Leaders seeking to effectively influence subordinates must establish a relationship that fosters success through trust, respect, and confidence.<sup>9</sup> The means to this end is an assessment of one's subordinates and the customized treatment of them vis-à-vis generic group treatments. The led are the most essential elements of the leadership equation since inappropriately dealing with them condemns the leader to failure at the onset.

The second major leadership factor centers on the 'leader'. As articulated by Sun Tzu more than 2500 years ago, a critical aspect of effective leadership is knowing oneself. Leaders must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses so that as leaders one can control and discipline oneself and subsequently effectively lead soldiers.<sup>10</sup> The path to successful leadership begins with self (the leader). As leaders we must assess our capabilities and seek to take advantage of our strengths and improve on our weaknesses. The recognition of one's limitations is important not only because it provides a base from which leaders can begin their development, but also because soldiers will quickly see our weaknesses as they manifest themselves and ultimately undermine effectiveness.

The infinite variety of 'situations' a leader may face is the next major factor. Leadership is situational in that there is no one solution that can be applied against an infinite variety of circumstances. The appropriate action for a given situation is governed by a host of variables both known and unknown. Some variables are the leader, the subordinate, the task, perceptions and the resources available. The dynamics of human interaction requires that

each situation be handled in accordance with its unique circumstances to achieve optimum results. Leadership is not a scientific endeavor where one can simply apply a formula to attain success, but rather, it is a dynamic interaction seeking to influence and or motivate others in accordance with to the leaders' desires.

The final major factor of leadership is 'communications'; that is the exchange of ideas and information from person to person.<sup>11</sup> Communication is not only the transmission of written and oral information but also the example a leader sets by his actions. The concept of communication embodies both verbal and nonverbal communications between a leader and his subordinates (the led). Additionally, effective communication entails good listening, sensitivity, and perceptiveness. Good listening means considering the ideas and needs of subordinates and their effects. Listening also enables new ideas to emerge which may assist leaders in achieving their goal. Effective leaders are aware of and sensitive to the needs of those they lead so as to capitalize on their strengths and compensate for known shortcomings. A leaders ability to anticipate situations through effective communications is

essential and is borne of a open and honest relationship attained through communication. In the end, effective leadership is dependent on effective communications since leaders must be able to relate their desires to the led.

The four doctrinal factors of leadership are omnipresent yet, their interaction is unique to each circumstance. The dynamic relationship of each factor must be considered and evaluated for a leader to effectively impart leadership.

Operational/Senior level leadership, while not wholly different from tactical leadership, is more complex in that one is more concerned with providing purpose and direction for organizations rather than individuals. Leadership at the senior/operational level is "the art of direct and indirect influence and the skill of creating the conditions for sustained organizational success to achieve the desired result".<sup>12</sup> In short, operational leadership is the forecasting of a future organizational endstate and the means of getting there. This is known as 'vision'. While vision is a critical centerpiece of operational leadership, purpose, direction, and motivation are its fundamental elements as well as the US Army's bedrock leadership tenets.



As fundamental elements of 'vision' these Army leadership tenets must be fully understood.

Purpose is an essential requirement for any organization that desires to optimize efficiency and provide guidance in difficult times. Additionally, operational leaders establish purpose to focus their organization and empower its members with the 'why' for their existence. Baron Von Steuben learned that soldiers, American soldiers in particular, performed best when they understood the 'why' for their actions.<sup>13</sup> The sharing of the 'why' with organizations not only focuses its members but also enables them with a sense of 'team', where everyone can assist in achieving its endstate. Additionally, the notion of 'team' assists organizations by harnessing diversity and directing it towards a specific end. "A team is not a team until every member understands how [his/her] actions affects the others."<sup>14</sup> In order for an operational leader to maximize their effectiveness they must promote a sense of team through sharing and understanding. Purpose is the means to this end. In the absence of purpose there is the tendency to act as discrete, incoherent entities.

"There is still a tendency in each separate unit...to be a one-handed puncher. By that I mean the rifleman wants to shoot, the tankier to charge, the artilleryman to fire . . . that is not the way to win . . . . . If the band played a piece first with the piccolo, then with the brass horn, then with the clarinet, and then with the trumpet there would be a hell of a lot of noise but no music. To get harmony in music each instrument must support the others....." <sup>15</sup>

Direction provides the means for creating the conditions for sustained organizational success.

Operational leaders are charged with providing a clear unambiguous course for their organizations by setting goals and standards, developing teams, ensuring discipline. <sup>16</sup>

Goals and standards set the organizational path. Teams provide resiliency through mutual support and burden sharing. Discipline ensures focus and performance in the absence of leaders and or guidance. The charting of an organizations direction coupled with a shared purpose creates a synergism that enables operational success.

Operational/Senior leaders are responsible for sustaining the moral climate force and must motivate subordinates to accomplish their mission. <sup>17</sup> Simply put, they must recognize individual and organizational needs and wants and influence them to accomplish the leader's end.

Motivation is effective when leaders understand their subordinates needs and merge them with the organizations. The success of this merger is multiplicative in nature where leaders act to fuse the needs of disparate elements of an organization to form a coherent whole. The means to this end is 'shared purpose' and 'ownership' in the organization and its future. This facilitates effective motivation by incorporating and empowering members. Leadership is based on the concept of a group effort where the whole is more than its individual components. Organizations are complex entities and effective operational leadership is central to its efficacy.

The ever changing face of conflict in modern times poses increasing challenges for the operational leader. Nevertheless, doctrine provides a means for adapting to and overwhelming these challenges. Doctrine, the distilled wisdom of history, that assists in establishing effective operational leadership through imperatives and guidelines. Operational leadership is "the art of direct and indirect influence and the skill of creating the conditions for sustained organizational success to achieve the desired result".<sup>18</sup> In the end, leadership at this level must

recognize and come to terms with what Clausewitz described as war's illusive face and apply the appropriate treatments to accomplish one's aim.

War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity.....within which the creative spirit is free to roam;.....<sup>19</sup>

Leadership at the operational level requires both professional competence and self-confidence. The operational leader must be able to analyze tactical situations and put them in perspective with the operational environment. Visualization of the future and patience with the current situation is essential for success at the operational level. Nevertheless, while experience is significant to effective and successful operational leadership, it is not a universal formula for success. If experience were the singular critical element, then the comment by Frederick the Great 'that his mules should be great battle captains since they were present on numerous campaigns' would be axiomatic. Experience, in and of itself, is of little value unless its lessons are well followed by learned and able leaders.

Perhaps the crux of operational leadership is teamwork. Teams manifest themselves at the operational level through staffs. The complex and divergent activities at the operational level require coordinated and thorough team/staff work directed by the clear vision of an operational leader. Teams complement and enrich the performance of its members creating an environment where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The value of teamwork at the operational level is probably best expressed in the words of an anonymous author who said "a team is not a team until each individual understands how his actions affects the others".<sup>20</sup> Hence, the task of the operational leader is to fuse the staff's efforts so that they coalesce into an effective plan.

## Operational Art

Operational art is a relatively new entry in the US Army lexicon. The first appearance of the term 'operational art' in the US Army doctrine was in the 1982 version of FM 100-5.<sup>21</sup> The purpose of operational art in US doctrine is to bridge the gap between strategic aims and tactical activities.

The concept of operational art was first used by the Soviet and German theorists and warfighters to devise explanations for the complexities of modern war. The results of their study revealed a new perspective of military art where scientific analysis and theory were merged and gave birth to a new understanding of and a new level of war, 'operational'.

The concept of 'operational art' sought to capitalize on the changes brought about as a result of the industrial revolution. Due to the an increase in lethality of weapons, warfare was evolving to a level of sophistication and required numerous new techniques, some of which were, improved command and control and dispersed fighting.

Some of the early theorist that promoted the concept of operational art were Sevchin, Triandafillov, and Tukhachevsky. Many of the ideas that these theorist advanced formed the foundation for operation art. These and other theorists were advocates for linking tactical operations with strategy and need the for successive and deep operations.

In the pre-industrial period of warfare armies were raised to fight limited wars for limited objectives where strategy was merely tactics by another name. However, the Napoleonic era forged a new interpretation on how wars were fought by raising the largest armies ever seen. Napoleonic warfare sought annihilation of opposing armies and the incorporation of opponents into his empire through decisive battle. Napoleon's warfare was based on massing at a single point and defeating any opponent.

The industrial period gave birth to a new way of thinking about war with its ability to raise large armies, mobilize rapidly, employ weapons of increased lethality and ranges, and ultimately conduct multiple and simultaneous operations. The emergence of these capabilities changed

the understanding and practice of military art and its component parts.

Napoleon style warfare was typified by the assembling of large armies in search of the single decisive battle. However, by the twentieth century the changes in capabilities brought by the industrial period changed the face of war. "The nature of operations was increasingly dictated by the thrust of higher-level preparation and planning, and operations themselves were no longer finite affairs leading to single decisive battle".<sup>22</sup> A new paradigm was emerging where preparation and conduct of operations no longer were confined within traditional strategy. New content, methods and issues were necessary for effective linkage to meet with changes in time, ranges, distances, and support. Hence, the US Army formally adopted and embraced the concept of 'operational art' as a means to bridge the gap between strategic aims and tactical activities.

The US Army in its capstone doctrinal manual (FM 100-5) defines operational art as "the skillful employment of military forces to attain strategic and/or operational objectives within a theater through the design,



organization, integration, and conduct of theater strategies, campaigns, major operations, and battles."<sup>23</sup> The intent of this portion of the monograph is to briefly explain what in theory is operational art and what it requires of leaders at this level of war. For the purpose of this section the author has adopted Dr. James Schneider's (Professor of Theory in the School of Advanced Military Studies Program) definition of operational art. First, his theory will provide a theoretical framework. Using that framework one can then demonstrate the unique requirements for leaders as they practice this form of warfare.

According to Dr. Schneider, Grant's Civil War campaign of 1864 - 1865 marked the emergence of the American practice of 'operational art'. Dr. Schneider's theory draws a sharp contrast between classical strategy and operational art by describing the concepts of distributed versus concentrated application forces.

Classical strategy, as practiced in the time of Napoleon, consisted of massing one's forces against an enemy and subsequently overwhelming him. Napoleon simply massed his combat power against his enemy at the time and

place of his choosing and defeated his enemy in detail. The acme of war in Napoleon's time was the decisive battle of annihilation. The armies of Napoleon's time were large formations which generally fought under the control of a single commander, where he could view the entire battle. The concentrated use of military force in this manner was designed to annihilate an enemy's army and subjugate its population into the conquer's empire. Additionally, this style of warfare emphasized the direct correlation between lethality of battle and mass and concentration at a single point.<sup>24</sup> Napoleon epitomized classical warfare and set the standard by massing large armies and through skill and maneuver decisively defeating his opponent in this style of warfare.

Clausewitz recognized the natural strife between dispersed fighting forces and concentrated forces. One aimed at the possession of territory, a country, and the other is oriented on an enemy's center of gravity, his fighting force. Napoleon's strategy of massing one's forces at the decisive point has dominated warfare and has been subsequently glorified and promulgated through the interpretations of both Clausewitz and Jomini. Perhaps the

beginning of a new era in warfare was introduced with Napoleon's division system.<sup>25</sup> The advent of the division system although not fully exploited, established the means of conducting independent operations.

The antithesis of this approach is the concept of distributed operations/operational art. Operational art, unlike classical strategy, sought multiple independent operations in time and space linked through a single aim.<sup>26</sup> Although operational art's unique style of distributed activity may seem disjointed, each activity is mutually reinforcing without necessarily being mutually dependent on each other. Dr. Schneider offers the following eight characteristics inherent in operational art:<sup>27</sup>

1. **Distributed Operation:** an ensemble of deep maneuvers and distributed battles extended in space and time but unified by a common aim. That common aim is the retention or denial of freedom of action
2. **Distributed Campaign:** is characterized by integration of several simultaneous and successive distributed operations. In a distributed campaign forces seldom concentrate at a single point.

3. Continuous Logistics: is concerned with the movement and sustainment of forces in the field. It sustains both the movement tempo and the force density of the army.
4. Instantaneous C<sup>2</sup>: the distributed nature of forces deployed creates a greater variety of unexpected or unanticipated tactical and operational possibilities. The end result of this variety is the necessity for acquisition of more information which drives more decisions.
5. Operationally Durable Formation: a formation capable of conducting indefinitely a succession of distributed operations facilitated by instantaneous C<sup>2</sup> and continuous logistics.
6. Operational vision: the intuitive ability to render incomplete and ambiguous information into a meaningful impression of the true state of affairs in a theater of war. Associated with mental agility, the ability to react to incoming information faster than it arrives. The ability to be 'perceptually fast'.
7. Distributed Enemy: similarity of design - an operationally durable formation is optimized when it faces a similarly designed opponent.
8. Distributed Deployment: the ability of a nation to sustain itself in a protracted

war - its infrastructure/resource capacity,  
production base, and mobilization ability.

Operational Art is the use of battles and operations separated in time and space for the purpose of accomplishing strategic war aims. The independent activities of operational art are bound by a single aim which offers a commander strategic because of minor tactical success. The regional nature that characterize modern warfare make operational activities especially suitable for combined arms operations by large articulated, resilient armies seeking a multitude of avenues to success. Unlike the classical warfare of Napoleon, which sought a single decisive battle by massing enormous armies fought by a single dominate commander, operational art introduced distributed operations, each essential and important in and of itself. In the past the single decisive battle offered the ultimate 'prize' (decisive victory) for a single engagement. However a new era of warfare has emerged and new methods are needed to control large armies over tremendous distance while maintaining a harmonious relationship between strategic aims and tactical activities. Dr. Schneider's attributes offers an example

for the practitioner of warfare a means of analyzing and or applying operational art as it manifests itself in warfare today. In the end, one must remember that this is only a theory and offers no absolute solution to the practical conduct of war in the field.

## Vision

The very essence of leadership is [that] you have to have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet.<sup>28</sup>

The establishment of a clear vision provides the essential guidance necessary for organizational success at the operational level. It is the enduring purpose that focuses the efforts and aspirations of all organizational activities. The intent of a leader's vision is to act as the framework for a unit's future status. A leader's vision is overarching and unmistakable, but not stifling. A leader's vision promotes initiative. Furthermore, vision focuses energy by empowering and transforming a leader's goal into an organizational goal. Visions are compelling, and effectively applied have a magnetic characteristic that draws members of an organization to it. Developing and sustaining a vision within an organization is essential to effective leadership.

The development of a vision is based on a leader's examination of an organization's past and present. A

vision is a realistic, credible, and desireable view of an organizations future state. While a leader's vision is focused on a future status for the organization, it is not constrained by prior organizational success or failure. The focus of a vision is the improved status of an organization through a compelling and inspiring outline of the leader's goals. The development of a vision is borne of a leaders experience and familiarity with the organization and its members. A leader's vision must not exist separate from that of its members if it is to be truly representative of the shared relationship between the leader and the led.<sup>29</sup> The role of vision is to inspire and empower organizational members toward a shared 'purpose'. In the end, a vision is both a guide and a goal that fosters a perception of what is worth striving for while simultaneously inspiring motivation toward an organization's adopted goal.

Effective visions are inspiring and inclusive seeking to build a bond based on a mutually agreed upon goal. The vision of an organization originates with its leader but it is not owned by any one member but rather it is the collective expression of the organization's commitment to



its future goal and its members. Visions are by their nature value laden entities produced in part by the relationship between the leader and the led. Visions are personal and group focused. As a result of this relationship, leaders must use every opportunity to promote their vision and inspire it through action. The vision lives in the vigor and enthusiasm of the leader and perpetuates its intensity in others.

An organization's vision "must be stable but constantly challenged - and changed at the margin."<sup>30</sup> Vision acts as a guide in the midst of chaos and as such it may be adjusted in execution to account for dynamic conditions. While the adjustment of an organization's vision may occur on the margins it remains a stable entity focused on the leader and organization's core values. The flexible nature of how a vision is executed promotes initiative and creativity in subordinates. One of the primary purposes of vision is to provide a reference point from which change can be measured and shaped. Again, the essential nature of a vision demands group ownership and participation in its formulation and execution. Leaders use vision as the vehicle to pull rather than push followers

together and inspire them to adopt and internalize the organization's vision. Vision empowers and transforms purpose into action in the pursuit of improvement.

Inchon was a portrait of operational vision.

MacArthur saw an amphibious landing at Inchon as the decisive means of compelling the Korean war to an inevitable conclusion.<sup>31</sup> While initially many did not share MacArthur's vision for Eighth Army, he nevertheless set out to convince the Joint Chiefs of his vision with the force of his oratory skills and his supreme intellect.<sup>32</sup>

Inchon possessed many obstacles yet the seemingly adverse circumstances presented in MacArthur's view, advantages.

Some of the obstacles to Inchon were the slope of the beaches and the thirty-two foot tidal range, one of the greatest in the world.<sup>33</sup> MacArthur's perspective of these obstacles was that they aided his operational plan by enabling surprise since surely the North Korean's would not anticipate a landing at Inchon in the midst of such overwhelming obstacles.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, MacArthur's

personal vision still needed to be adopted by the organization if it was to have any chance of success. The Army, on 28 August, formally adopted MacArthur's vision

for Inchon. Although there was skepticism about its success, MacArthur's vision remained essentially as he proposed. The minor adjustment to MacArthur's vision, as adopted by the organization, represents the dynamics between a vision and its successful execution. Furthermore, the flexibility afforded by this interaction promotes ownership and initiative within the organization. MacArthur's vision focused, empowered and transformed purpose into action.

Vision is essential to leadership at the operational level. The independent nature of activities at the operational level of war are bound by a single aim, the vision, which is designed to focus the operational leader as he seeks to fuse tactical activities with strategic aims. The vision provides stability and continuity that transcends all activities. Vision is the result of the leader's input and organizational participation and is owned by the organization. In a Clausewitzian sense, vision is the operational leader's coup d'oeil of what his organization must be capable of in the future.

## Mentoring

As we begin the 21st century it is essential that the necessary leadership development processes not only be in place but actively producing leaders capable of assuming the reign of operational leadership. The means to this end is mentoring, where senior leaders afford subordinates the advantage of vicarious learning through their experiences. It was once said that he who learns through personal experience alone is a fool, but conversely, he who not only learns from personal experience but also that of others, is truly a wise man.<sup>35</sup> Mentoring is a vehicle to bridge the gap between limited personal experiences and that of many successful leaders at the operational level.

Leadership, the most important tenet of combat power is enhanced through mentoring. Mentoring is indirectly described in Army doctrinal manuals as coaching and teaching however, these concepts only narrowly reveal the true meaning and potency of effective mentoring. Mentoring, in this author's opinion, is a professional and personal developmental process of educating, nurturing, and sharing

experiences between senior leaders and subordinates.

Teaching and coaching in Army leadership doctrine focuses on specific tasks during designated periods whereas mentoring aims to assist throughout a career. Mentoring is an anchor point essential to operational leadership. The development of leaders capable of effectively leading diverse, independent forces at the operational level is enhanced through mentoring. Mentoring permits followers (the led) to become acquainted with a successful and mature style of leadership that should provide the means to assist in developing the protégé's own style of leadership.

Mentoring is a value added concept in that it not only benefits the protégé, but also the mentor and the organization. Traditionally, in the mentor-protégé relationship, the protégé obtains many benefits such as accelerated cultural education, holistic organizational awareness, social integration, and improved self confidence.<sup>36</sup> Mentoring affords the protégé the advantage of focused learning and the association with successful leaders as they encounter and resolve real world situations. This experience alone is of infinite value, since it creates an environment where the protégé can learn vicariously and

"cost" free. The benefit of learning in a non-threatening and stress-free environment is invaluable. Moreover, the protégé gains the perspective of the organization as viewed from the mentor's vantage point.

Mentoring can help assist emerging leaders with early career decisions and steer them around potential pitfalls. In short, the mentor seeks to promote the protégé's abilities thereby advancing the protégé's status at a rate not yet available to all of the protégé's peers. Nevertheless, the protégé is not the only beneficiary of this relationship but also the organization benefits.

In the mentoring relationship the organization reaps stability from the sharing of organizational values between the mentor and protégé.<sup>37</sup> The ideal result of this relationship is one where the protégé is the successor to the mentor. The advantages afforded the protégé from the mentor are designed to increase the protégé's performance, commitment, and loyalty which enhances the well being of the organization.

The complexity of leadership at the operational level demands mentoring so as to provide the necessary leader development. Operational leadership requires a wide range

of skills of which the individual experience affords the leader only a few. Mentoring is a means of supplementing limited experiences. At the operational level the value of a mentor is exponential relative to his cost. It cultivates, nurtures, and promotes known core values. The mentor-protégé relationship enhances stability and sets up a potential line of leader succession. The skills that protégés learn will enable them to be more smoothly integrated into the leadership role and more productive at an earlier rate than if the mentor-protégé relationship did not exist.

Operational leadership requires intuition, confidence, and talent gained through a study of history, theory, doctrine, and effective mentorship. Mentoring enhances limited experience through focused learning and sharing. The successful careers of the below mentioned officers speak for themselves and can in part be attributed to effective mentoring.

The mentoring of George S. Patton, George C. Marshall, and Douglas MacArthur by General John J. Peshing reflects the success of effective mentoring.<sup>38</sup> The relationship shared by these officers (proteges) and their mentor

resulted in their accelerated cultural education and exposure to ideas and problem solving techniques unavailable to their peers.

In each of these relationships the protege's talents were developed, reinforced, and highlighted in a manner to facilitate rapid yet mature development. The mentoring of these officers benefited not only their development but supported the organization's longevity and stability as well. While mentoring will not supplant talent it is a multiplier, especially at the operational level where ambiguity and uncertainty is common.

Another example of successful mentoring is that of the "boathouse gang" where General Depuy mentored a group of officers who produced the '76 version of the Army's capstone doctrinal manual FM 100-5.<sup>39</sup> Mentoring aids in the development of operational leaders by providing a means to maximize our most important element of combat power 'leadership'. The results of mentoring are indisputable and one cannot deny the accelerated affect it affords in the development of successful operational leaders.

Despite the many positive outcomes of mentoring the Army is reluctant to adopt it formally and define it in



unambiguous terms. Some of the side effects of mentoring are the fear that it may not serve the interests of the organization but rather, those of individuals and thus resulting in predominately personal not professional relationships. Notwithstanding this negative aspect, mentoring is key to the long term sustainment of effective operational leadership. Mentoring establishes an organizational climate where professional learning is promoted and the accumulated experience of senior leaders is shared with subordinates to enhance the efficiency and provide for the future leadership of the organization. Effective operational leadership motivates subordinates to develop and perform beyond expectations. Mentoring empowers the led to become leaders. Successful leadership at the operational level is built on professional and personal identification with the leader and a shared organizational vision.

## Operational Leadership and Organizational Culture

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.<sup>40</sup>

Culture is a powerful and intangible entity that compromises the shared assumptions within organizations. These mutually adopted assumptions are reflected through the learned behavior of the group and indicate what the group believes are its important values. As these behaviors are adopted and reinforced through group functions they become the norm and govern the way the group view both themselves and the world.<sup>41</sup>

Operational leaders must understand their organizations culture and be an expression of it if they are to truly influence it and ultimately accomplish the organization's vision. Furthermore, the importance of culture to leadership is manifested in the leaders actions through consistency and trust. While the culture of an

organization tends to be taken-for-granted, it is its' very life line and often dictates success or failure of the organization.

Leadership acts are expressions of culture. Leadership as cultural expression seeks to build unity and order within an organization by giving attention to purposes, ..... tradition, and ideals and norms which define the way of life within the organization and which provide the bases for socializing members and obtaining compliance.<sup>42</sup>

Culture is the external manifestation of an organization's personality as shaped and influenced by its operational leader. Hence, it is imperative that operational leaders take an active role in shaping the organization's culture in its formative development lest they relinquish their ability to effectively lead.

Consistency of action is a means by which operational leaders formulate its organization's culture. The systematic attention of the leader to events important to the leader communicates powerfully to subordinates the standard. Leaders must be aware that their actions, reactions, or lack thereof formulate the organization's culture. Subordinates within an organization quickly assess and determine what is important by the leaders

actions and not the intensity or volume of his rhetoric. Consistency is a benchmark for effective operational leadership as it seeks to shape its organizations culture and future.

The development and adoption of shared assumptions generates efficiency, balance, and comfort within organizations. Effective organizational cultures not only enhance performance, but also create a predictable environment where subordinates can anticipate activities and maximize initiative. In the end, effective organizational cultures that are shaped and influenced by operational leaders allow organizations to attain the vision with minimal friction.

Organizational culture has a significant impact on organizations because of shared assumptions that guide the behavior of the organization. Nevertheless, the influence of these shared assumptions is often neglected because of their routine nature. Organizations are goal oriented entities, and as such, operational leaders through their vision, directly influence the organization's future. However, if the leader is to ensure that his vision is being carried out, his actions must be consistent with that

vision. The leaders actions ultimately set the organizations priorities and standards which determine its culture.

William Joseph Slim, a British Field Marshal during World War II, is an example of an operational leader who successfully nurtured and shaped his organization's culture. Slim was a British officer of the lower-middle class, which usually meant one could not expect to achieve high rank in the British Army.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, he joined the British Army and served with distinction, ultimately winning a commission and attaining the rank of Field Marshall and Viscount which were indicative of high stature in both the military and social cultures.

Slim was relegated to operations in Burma with the Indian Army, the best an officer of his status could expect.<sup>44</sup> There Slim earned his fame in Burma where he restored the fighting capability of the British and Indian forces and decisively defeated the Japanese. One of the first tasks that Slim faced was the establishment of a viable organizational culture whereby he could build and sustain an effective force. The means to this end were the following set of maxims which Slim's army operated within:<sup>45</sup>

- The ultimate intention must be an offensive one.
- The main idea on which the plan was based must be simple
- That idea must be held in view throughout and everything must give way to it.
- The plan must have an element of surprise.

The simplicity of these maxims were brilliant and established the means to an effective organizational culuture. Slims maxims served as the manifestation of his personality which were simplicity, consistency, and trust. The development and adoption of these shared assumptions as a way of operating enabled efficiency, initiative, and predictability within Slim's command culture. In the end, Slim changed the culture of the British army, by emphasizing merit over lineage and social status which enhanced the performance and stability of his organization.

Operational leaders can ill afford to neglect organizational culture. Culture is a means by which operational leaders shape and influence the organization's future. The personality of an organization is displayed through its culture and underlies key aspects of the operational leader's way of thinking and operating. Operational leaders must capitalize on the advantages afforded them in the formulation of their organization's

culture. Operational leaders must recognize that culture within their organization is a highly complex phenomenon and one of their first tasks is to discern their role in its cultivation and sustainment.<sup>43</sup> Since culture is a pattern of shared assumptions, a leader cannot quickly or totally change an organization's culture. However, through consistent action an operational leader can, over time, influence and shape the organization's behavior. In the end, operational leaders must acknowledge that cultures are complex living entities susceptible to change and operational leadership is the tool to this end. Operational leadership begins with a vision, and then molds its organization's culture, thereby setting the conditions for effective mentoring and long term organizational success.

## Conclusion

The challenges of the future demand that leaders at the operational level (i.e. corps and army level) have a thorough understanding of war, especially at the operational level. The nature of future conflict is likely to be regional rather than global. Hence, there is a need for operational leaders who can implement policy and sustain forces in a potentially isolated environment. The required leadership at the operational level is attained through the study of history and theory as well as education, training and experience. The specific means to attain this level of leadership is acquired through vision, mentoring and effective development of an organizational culture.

Vision is the operational leaders means of focusing his organization to move to an improved future state. A leader's vision comes from both internal and external sources and to be effective it must be adopted by the entire organization. An effective vision is inspiring and empowering and a collective expression of both the leader and the organization's commitment to its future. However,



for a vision to be a guiding beacon, a leader must model his behavior such that it is consistent with that vision.

Operational leaders use vision to bring the organization together and focus its operational efforts. MacArthur's vision for the Eighth Army at Inchon is an example of an operational commander with a personal vision that was successfully adapted and adopted by his organization.

Vision is the operational leader's tool to transform purpose into action in the pursuit of improvement.

Mentoring is a key aspect of operational leadership in that it affords the operational leader the opportunity to develop and nurture emerging leaders. Pershing's mentoring of Patton, Marshall, and MacArthur are examples of effective mentoring. Mentoring allowed these emerging leaders to acquire accelerated development through the professional and social association with General Pershing. The results of these relationship are increased performance, initiative, and commitment, all of which promote and contribute to success at the operational level.

The culture in which operational leaders operate is important in that it either supports the operational leaders vision or renders it inept. Organizational culture is in

part a manifestation of the operational leader's personality. Operational leadership that promotes initiative and sharing is more likely to attain the leader's vision efficiently than one that does not. Culture is a means by which operational leaders shape and influence their organization's future. Slim in Burma effectively influenced his organization's culture by eliminating outdated and inefficient methods of promotion and replaced them with merit based advancement thereby enhancing his organization's culture and potential for success. Therefore, success at the operational level demands an organizational culture that mentors its emerging leaders and promotes the organization's vision.

Leadership at the operational level is complex and demanding and as such it requires leaders who thoroughly understand the operational level of war. The means to this end is the development of a clear and inspiring vision, an effective mentoring program to grow future leaders rapidly and efficiently, and to sustain a culture that is supportive and adaptive. The impact of effective operational leadership is transforming and characteristic of the leader's values and vision.

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14. Unknown Author, acquired through the course of the author's reading.

15. This passage is one acquired from the author's reading of one of George Patton's lectures - the author believes the lecture was titled 'The Musicians of Mars' no other specific data is known by the author.

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